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ABSTRACT

This report synthesizes the initial findings of a roundtable discussion related to both immigration and poverty and outlines some preliminary public policy conclusions in order to clarify immediate immigration policy proposals and potential poverty policy implications for the labor market relationship between Hispanic immigrants and disadvantaged U.S.-born Hispanics. The body of the report consists of a discussion paper by Julie Quiroz organized in four parts: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Immigration and the Measurement of Hispanic Poverty"; (3) "Immigration as a Cause of Hispanic Poverty"; and (4) "Conclusions." The following conclusions are offered: (1) data on the Hispanic foreign-born do not significantly distort statistical measures of Hispanics' overall economic status; (2) U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics share similar human capital characteristics and could benefit equally from human capital development; (3) rhetoric which has the effect of "scapegoating" immigrants may be a political barrier to anti-poverty strategies and contributes to broad anti-Hispanic sentiment; and (4) policies that negatively affect immigrants can also have adverse effects on U.S.-born Hispanics. Fifteen figures are included, along with 2 sources, and 40 endnotes. A discussion summary of the roundtable, which brought together advocates, policy analysts, and researchers, is appended. (JS)

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HISPANIC POVERTY:

HOW MUCH DOES IMMIGRATION EXPLAIN?

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The discussion paper and roundtable summary were prepared by Julie Quiroz, Senior Policy Analyst and Director of the National Council of La Raza's Poverty Project. Dr. Fred Romero, a Senior Policy Analyst with NCLR on loan from the Department of Labor, carried out an extensive literature review and analysis, and helped develop the underlying research and policy framework of the paper. Charles Kamasaki, NCLR Vice President for Research, Advocacy, and Legislation assisted with the preparation of Section III of the paper. Former Policy Analysis Fellow Abel Valenzuela provided initial research for Section II. Policy Analysis Fellow Leticia Miranda provided technical assistance and logistical support. Senior Immigration Policy Analyst Cecilia Munoz reviewed drafts and provided useful suggestions throughout the development of the paper.

THE NCLR POVERTY PROJECT

The Poverty Project serves as NCLR's base for information and advocacy regarding Hispanic poverty in the United States. The Project is supported primarily by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

The Role of the Poverty Project

- **Promoting effective public policies.** The Poverty Project develops reports which analyze, identify, and promote public policies to reduce poverty;

- **Providing issue forums.** The Poverty Project stimulates ideas and interaction by sponsoring discussion roundtables, workshops, workshops, and fellowships, and through participation in academic conferences;

- **Cultivating public support and understanding.** The Poverty Project disseminates information to Congress through briefings and testimony; to the media through press conferences and interviews; to local and national organizations through presentations and a quarterly newsletter; and to the general public through articles and editorials.

For more information about NCLR's Poverty Project, contact: Julie Quiroz, Senior Policy Analyst, (202) 289-1380, extension 218.

Hispanic Poverty:
How Much Does Immigration Explain?

Proceedings from the National Council of La Raza's
Poverty Project Roundtable
November 27, 1989

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810 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002
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Raul Yzaguirre,
President

Foreword

Since its inception in 1988, the National Council of La Raza's Poverty Project has focused on identifying policies to reduce poverty among Hispanics, and the ways in which these policies may differ from those targeted to other populations. One unique characteristic of both the poor and non-poor Hispanic population is a high proportion of the foreign-born. This foreign-born proportion clearly distinguishes the Mexican American and Central American poor from the Afro-American poor, and within the Hispanic poverty population itself, produces some significant distinctions.

Recognizing these distinctions, we asked ourselves two questions: are the present challenges of the poor -- educational disadvantage; concentration in low-wage, dead-end jobs; persistent discrimination and segregation -- explained or diminished by the presence of foreign-born Hispanics? And, does the presence of large numbers of foreign-born Hispanics mean that different government programs and policies are needed to serve the poor? The first question, which provides a context for the second, became the stimulus for the Project's exploration of the relationship between immigration and poverty.

On November 27, 1989, the Poverty Project hosted a one-day discussion roundtable in which public policy analysts, advocates, and members of the research community discussed the statistical and economic relationship between Hispanic immigration and the persistence of poverty among Hispanics in the U.S.

Now, it is my pleasure to present the initial findings of this exploration, including a final version of the discussion paper prepared for the roundtable, and a summary of the presentations and discussion which took place at the roundtable. This document is a beginning rather than an end, providing a non-technical introduction to the issues which have been central in immigration research, and calling attention to some provocative unanswered questions. Most importantly, these proceedings pave the way for continued examination of the relationship between nativity status and poverty.

As the issues of Hispanic poverty and Hispanic immigration become increasingly significant in the decade of the 1990s, we hope this preliminary exploration will serve as a useful foundation for approaching the complex questions to come.

Raul Yzaguirre
President
April 16, 1990

Summary

Both the roundtable discussion paper and the roundtable itself focused on three central questions:

(1) Do data on foreign-born Hispanics distort statistical measures of Hispanics' overall economic status?

(2) Does immigration cause poverty among U.S.-born Hispanics?

(3) What current and potential public policy significance do answers to these questions hold?

The discussion paper summarizes the income and poverty differentials between native and foreign-born Hispanics, analyzes these differences, and examines labor market research regarding the relationship between immigration and poverty. Several broad conclusions are discussed:

- Most evidence indicates that data on the Hispanic foreign-born do not significantly distort statistical measures of Hispanics' overall economic status. Overemphasis of Hispanic immigration may divert attention from policy responses to Hispanic poverty;

- U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics share similar human capital characteristics and could benefit equally from human capital development;

- Rhetoric which has the effect of "scapegoating" immigrants may be a political barrier to anti-poverty strategies and contributes to broad anti-Hispanic sentiment;

- Since problems such as discrimination occur among both U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics, and since a large proportion of foreign-born Hispanic households also include U.S. citizens, policies that negatively affect immigrants can also have adverse effects on U.S.-born Hispanics.

The subsequent roundtable discussion, which brought together advocates, policy analysts, and researchers, generally confirmed the findings of the discussion paper, and added a number of additional observations:

- The empirical evidence confirms that U.S.-born Hispanics -- who constitute the majority of all Hispanics -- face substantial economic disadvantage apart from the issue of immigration;

- There is an increasing need for data which distinguishes U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics;

- The immigrant experience may have important implications for theories and definitions of poverty and the "underclass"; understanding of immigration-related issues may become increasingly important for poverty analysts.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Among the next decade's emerging issues, two important trends have already struck national public consciousness: the growing proportion of Hispanics among the nation's poor and the growing proportion of Hispanic immigrants in the nation's workforce. Like most trends however, understanding lags far behind recognition. Few poverty analysts have explored the ways in which poverty among foreign-born Hispanics could alter poverty theories and policies.[1] At the same time, speculation and misconceptions about Hispanic immigration remain at the forefront of current immigration policy. Lack of such analyses is made all the more troubling by frequent scapegoating of immigrants, and traditional American ambivalence toward both immigrants and the poor.

To clarify both immediate immigration policy proposals and potential poverty policy implications, the following report synthesizes research related to both immigration and poverty and outlines some preliminary public policy conclusions. Drawing primarily on immigration research, this paper focuses on the labor market relationship between Hispanic immigrants and disadvantaged U.S.-born Hispanics.[2] Three questions are the primary focus of this paper:

(1) Do data on Hispanic immigrants distort statistical measures of Hispanics' overall economic status?

(2) Does immigration cause poverty among U.S.-born Hispanics?

(3) What current and potential public policy significance do answers to these questions hold?

II. IMMIGRATION AND THE MEASUREMENT OF HISPANIC POVERTY

A. The Data

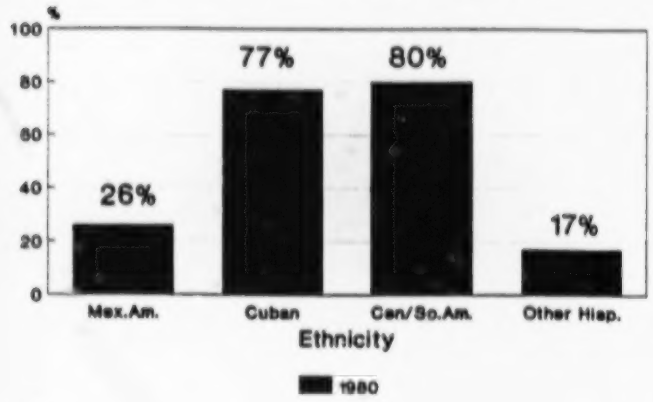
Aggregate measurements are the most frequently used indicators of Hispanics' economic well-being. Although the limitations of such aggregate measurements are significant, they remain the basis for most discussion of the Hispanic population. The following section examines the nativity of the Hispanic population and the impact of immigrant data on aggregate economic status statistics.

Data on Hispanics' economic status are collected every March; however, only the decennial Census provides a sample size large enough with which to make meaningful comparisons between U.S.-born Hispanic data and foreign-born Hispanic data. Nineteen-eighty is therefore the last year for which accurate information is available.

B. Nativity

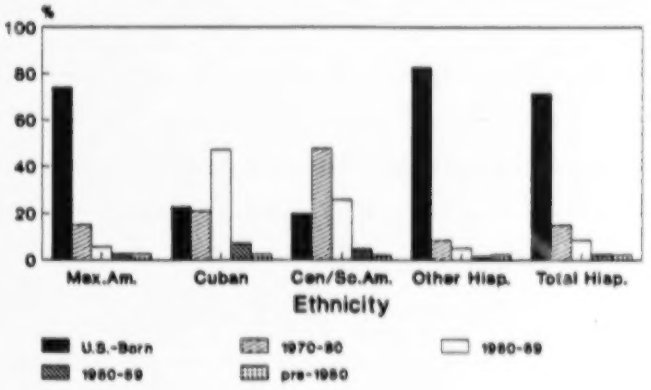
According to the 1980 Census, about 2/3 of all Hispanics were born in the United States. As Table 1 illustrates, however, wide variations existed between Hispanic ethnic groups: 26% of Mexican Americans were foreign-born, 77% of Cuban Americans, 80% of Central and South Americans, and 17% of Other Hispanics.[3]

1) Proportion of Foreign-Born Hispanics, By Ethnicity



Bean and Tienda, 1988

2) Hispanics: Proportions of U.S. Born & Foreign-Born By Arrival Year, Ethnicity



Source: Bean and Tienda

In addition, as Table 2 illustrates, each ethnic group's foreign-born population was distributed differently by periods of arrival. In 1980, 15% of all Hispanics had come to the U.S. during the preceding decade, with a total of 23.7% having arrived since 1960. However, the relative "newness" of the Hispanic population varies by ethnic group, reflecting the economic and political situation of the country of origin. For example, in 1980, close to half of Central and South Americans had come to the U.S. in the preceding ten years. Among Mexican Americans, who represent about 60% of all Hispanics, only 15.1% had arrived in the 1970s. Unlike other populations, the majority of Cuban immigrants dated their arrival to the U.S. between 1960 and 1969.

Using the tables above, two overall conclusions may be drawn:

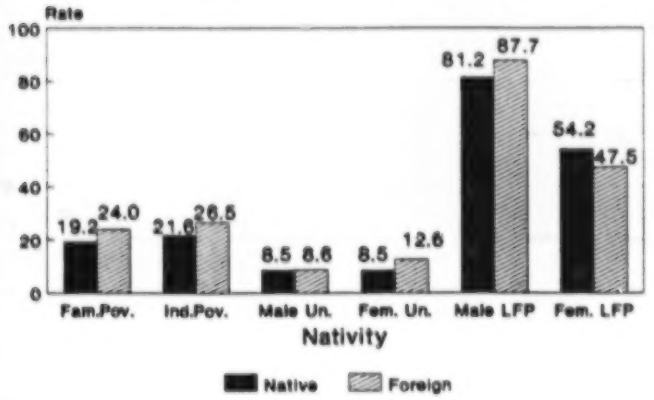
- Following a decade of high Hispanic immigration, the 1980 Census revealed that only 3 out of every 20 Hispanics had come to the U.S. during the 1970s.

- Except for Central and South Americans (about 8% of the 1980 Hispanic population), no Hispanic group showed a recent immigrant proportion of higher than about one-fifth.

C. Nativity and Economic Status Measures

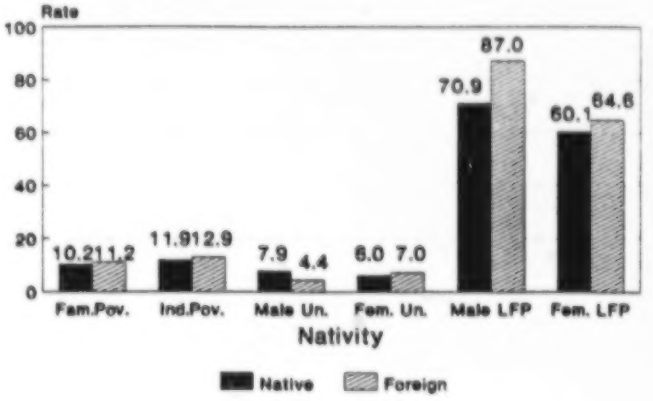
According to the 1980 Census Bureau data, data on foreign-born Hispanics have a small but significant impact on aggregate measures of Hispanic economic status. The following charts illustrate the impact of immigrant data on some of these measurements.

3) 1980 Economic Status Indicators
Mexican: U.S. & Foreign-Born



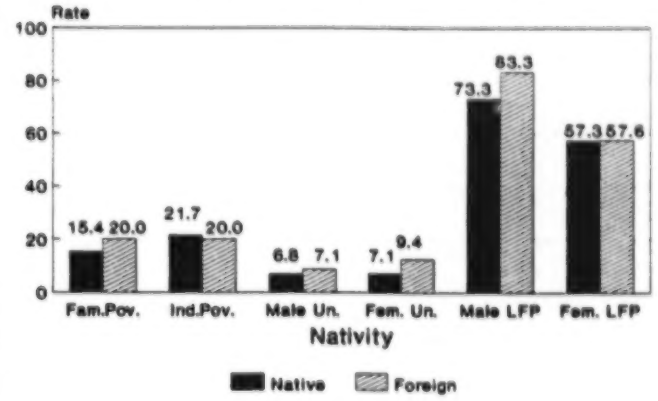
Source: Bean and Tienda

4) 1980 Economic Status Indicators
Cuban: U.S.- & Foreign-Born



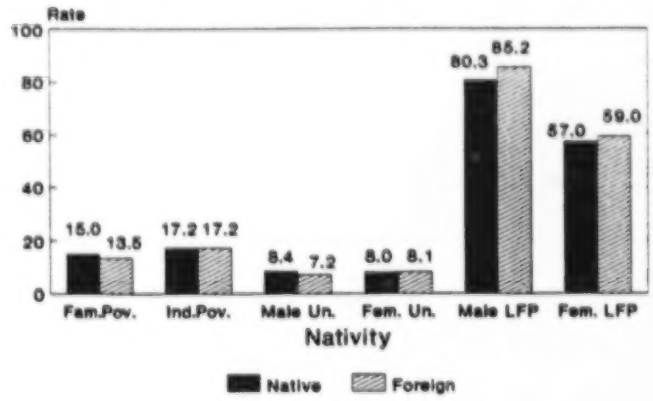
Source: Bean and Tienda

5) 1980 Economic Status Indicators, Central
& South American: U.S.- & Foreign-Born



Source: Bean and Tienda

6) 1980 Economic Status Indicators
Other Hispanic: U.S.- & Foreign-Born



Source: Bean and Tienda

As these charts show, the economic status differentials between the native- and foreign-born are significant, and vary substantially by subgroup and gender.

Among Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans, poverty is somewhat higher among the foreign-born, with the greatest differential occurring between the poverty rates of native-born Central and South Americans (16.4%) and those of foreign-born Central and South Americans (20.0%). For the category of Other Hispanics, the foreign-born family poverty rate was somewhat lower than that of the native-born, while the individual poverty rates were about the same.

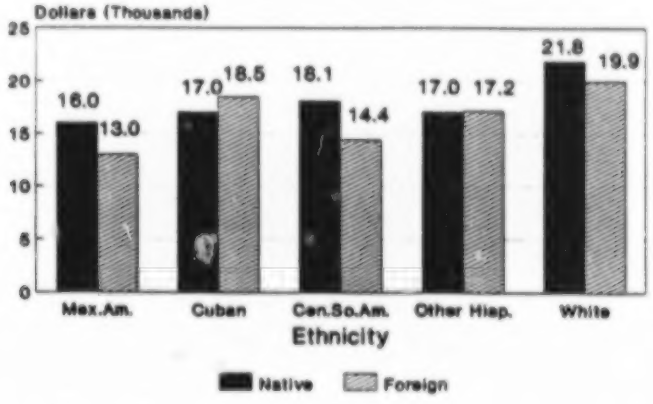
In terms of unemployment, no generalizations can be made about subgroups because of the dramatic differences between the male and female indicators. Among Mexican American, Cuban, and Central and South American women, unemployment was higher among the foreign-born, with the largest differential between the unemployment rate of native-born Mexican Americans (8.5%) and that of the foreign-born (12.6%). Among Other Hispanics, there was no difference between the unemployment rates of native- and foreign-born women.

Subgroup generalizations are also impossible with regard to labor force participation, with similarities occurring by gender. Among women in all subgroups, the differential between native- and foreign-born rates was small, with the largest occurring between the rate of native-born Mexican women (54.2%) and the somewhat lower rate of foreign-born Mexican women (47.5%). For men of all subgroups, the foreign-born had slightly higher labor force participation rates.

D. Nativity and Income

As Table 7 illustrates, the median family income of U.S.-born Hispanics is generally higher than that of foreign-born Hispanics.

7) Median Family Income, U.S.- & Foreign-Born: 1980



Bean and Tienda, 1988

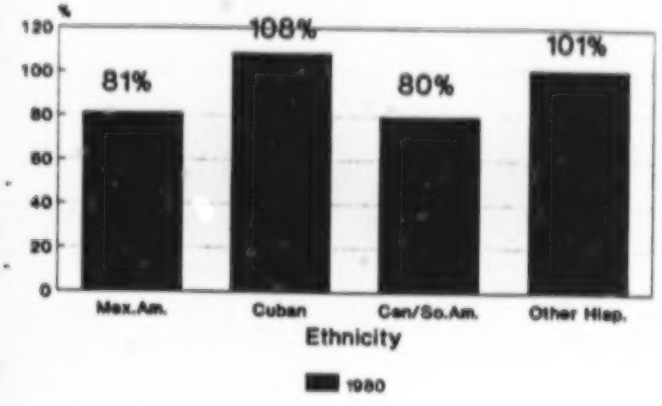
Among Mexican Americans, the 1980 median family income of the U.S.-born was 19% higher than that of the foreign-born. The difference between the median incomes of U.S.- and foreign-born Central and South Americans was also significant, with U.S.-born median family income exceeding foreign-born median family income by 20%.

Cuban Americans and Other Hispanics present the only exceptions to this pattern: U.S.-born Cuban American median family income was 8% lower than that of their foreign-born counterparts. Among Other Hispanics -- a somewhat questionable "catch-all" category -- U.S.-born median family income was a tiny 0.8% lower than that of the foreign-born.

Table 8 further illustrates the relationship between the incomes of native-born and foreign-born families. In this table, foreign-born median family income is shown as a percentage of native-born family income. In 1980, foreign-born Mexican median family income equaled 81% of the median for U.S.-born families. Among the Cuban foreign-born, median family income surpassed that of their native-born counterparts, reaching 108% of U.S.-born median income. The median family income of U.S.-born and foreign-born Central and South Americans were also significantly different, with the foreign-born median income equaling 80% of U.S.-born median income.

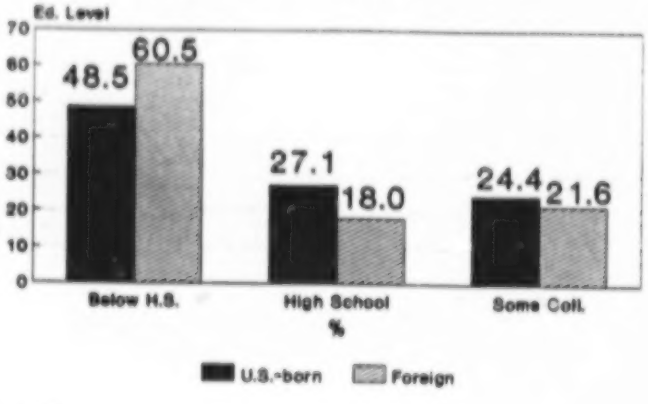
Table 9 indicates differences in educational attainment between U.S-born and foreign-born Hispanics. Because educational attainment has been so closely tied with labor market success, these educational attainment data are included within the context of economic status indicators. In 1980, 60% of foreign-born Hispanics had less than a high-school diploma, compared to just under 50% of the U.S.-born. There are also significant differences in educational attainment by ethnicity. Among foreign-born Mexican Americans, 77% had fewer than 12 years of education. Among foreign-born Cuban Americans, this figure was 43%.

8) Foreign-Born Median Family Income As A % of U.S.-Born Income: 1980



Bean and Tienda, 1988

9) Educational Attainment: 1980, U.S.- & Foreign-Born

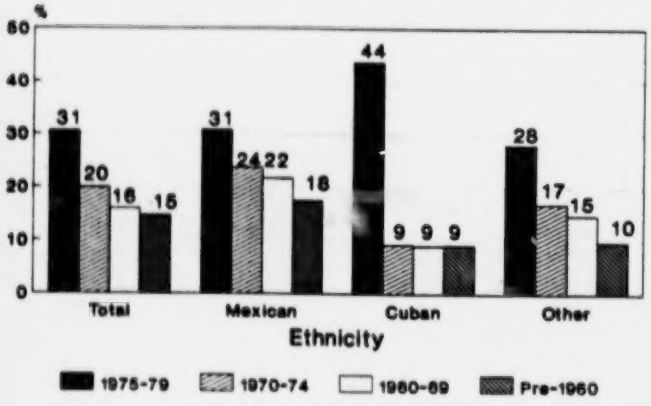


O'Hare, 1989

E. Economic Status and Period of Arrival

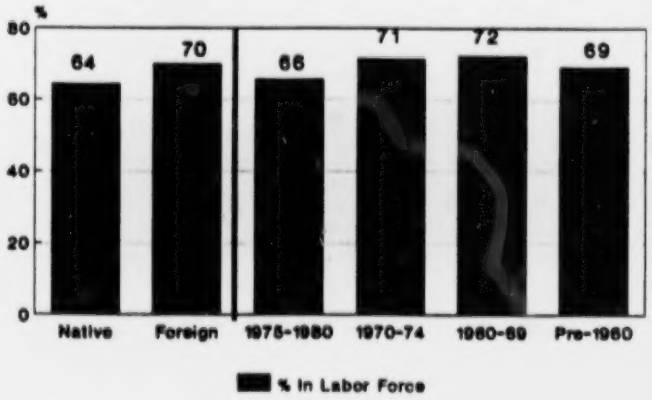
Each of the above tables compared data on foreign-born Hispanics and overall data on Hispanics' economic status. The following tables illustrate another comparison: data on foreign-born Hispanics of different periods of immigration.

10) Foreign-Born Hispanic Poverty Rates: (Age 16-64): By Year of Immigration



O'Hare, 1989

11) Labor Force Participation: U.S.- and Foreign-Born By Year of Immigration



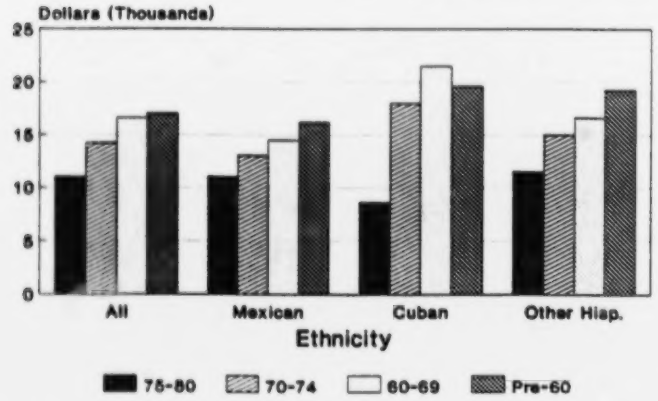
O'Hare, 1989

As table 10 shows, Hispanic poverty rates vary depending on how long immigrants have been in the U.S. Among the Mexican foreign-born, 1980 poverty rates ranged from 31% among those who had immigrated in the preceding 5 years to 18% among those who had immigrated prior to 1960. Among Cubans, the disparity was even more dramatic, ranging from 44% among the most recent immigrants to 9% among all others. For Hispanics overall, the poverty rate of the most recent immigrants was about twice that of immigrants from the pre-1960 period.

Table 11 illustrates the differences in labor force participation rates between the foreign-born of different arrival periods. Unlike the poverty rates, labor force participation rates did not vary substantially by arrival period. Although the rate for the most recent immigrant was lower than for immigrants of other periods, it was only 5 percentage points lower than the rate of those who immigrated prior to 1960.

Table 12 shows the variation in median family income depending on arrival period. Again, those immigrants who had been in the U.S the longest have the highest median income. Those who had been in the U.S. for less than 5 years had significantly lower median family incomes.

12) Foreign-Born Hispanic Median Family Income, By Year of Immigration:1980

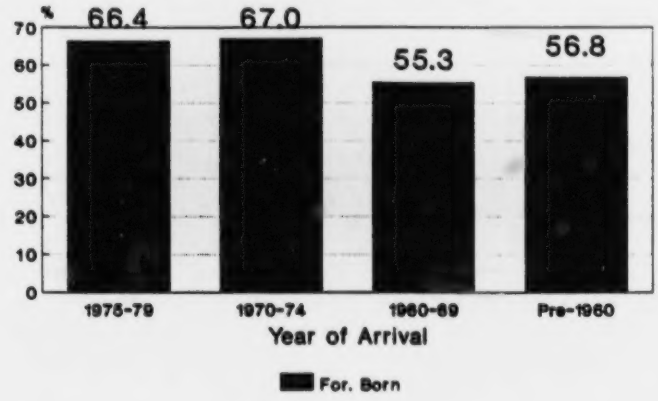


O'Hare, 1989

F. Educational Attainment and Period of Arrival

As Table 13 illustrates, educational attainment is also related to arrival period. Among the most recent immigrants, 66.4% had less than a high school education. However, among Hispanics who arrived before 1960, a somewhat lower 56.8% had not completed high school.

13) Less Than High School Education, Foreign-Born: 1980



O'Hare, 1989

G. Conclusion

Four conclusions may be drawn regarding the impact of immigrant data on aggregate measures of Hispanics' economic well-being:

(1) Immigrant data produce a slight depression in measures of Hispanics' overall economic well-being.

According to the 1980 data, poverty among the foreign-born is generally higher than poverty among the U.S. born. The income and earnings of foreign-born Hispanics were also significantly lower than those of the U.S.-born, as were median educational attainment levels.

(2) The most substantial economic status depression results from data on the most recent immigrants.

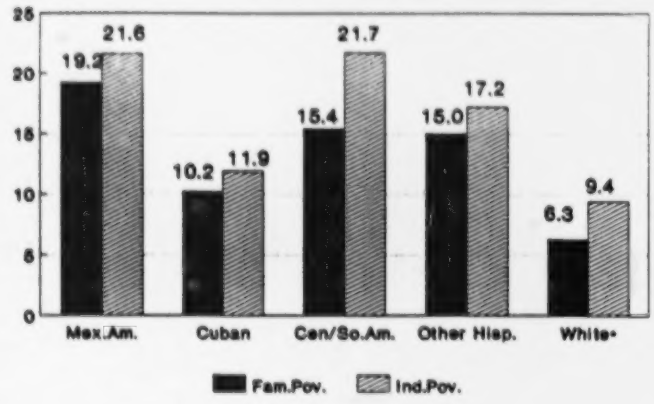
In 1980, poverty rates of recent immigrants were significantly higher than those of earlier immigrants. Median family income and educational attainment also vary with period of arrival: the more time in the U.S., the higher the median income.

Some caution should be exercised in interpreting these data. Because Census data do not follow the same group of people over time, they cannot demonstrate "progress." Without more detailed longitudinal data, a range of speculations could be made with regard to the disparities between immigrants of different immigration periods. For example, if a core of immigrants maintained a consistently high economic status from the time of their arrival, declining poverty by period of immigration could simply reflect a gradual return migration of those of those with low economic status. In short, if the proportion of low-income immigrants gets smaller, the overall poverty rate falls --- but not because of economic progress.

(3) Despite the significant subgroup variations discussed above, the economic status of each subgroup was lower than that of non-Hispanic Whites.

As charts 14 and 15 below illustrate, the individual and family poverty rates of non-Hispanic Whites were lower than those of the native-born of any Hispanic subgroup, as were the non-Hispanic White male and female unemployment rates. The female labor force participation rate of non-Hispanic Whites was comparable to those of Hispanic women in each subgroup, while the labor force participation rate of non-Hispanic White men was somewhat higher.

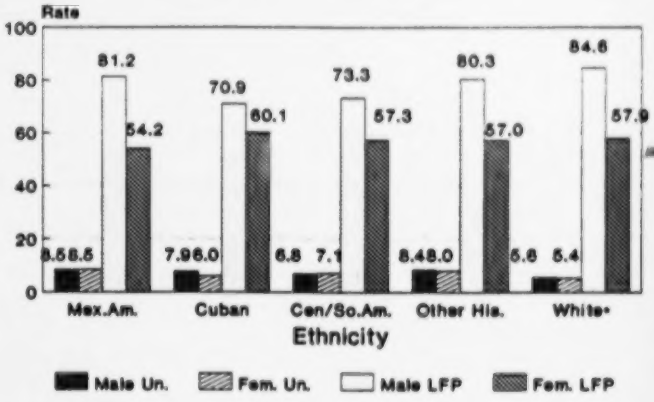
14) 1980 Poverty Rates: U.S.-Born Hispanics, Non-Hispanic Whites



Source: Bean and Tienda

*Non-Hispanic White

15) 1980 Poverty Rates: U.S.-Born Hispanics, Non-Hispanic Whites



Source: Bean and Tienda

*Non-Hispanic White

(4) The 1980 data do not reflect changes which have occurred over the past decade; the impact of 1980s immigration on the Hispanic population will not be adequately documented until the 1990 Census. However, the differential between Hispanic and non-Hispanic economic status indicators appears to have remained significant throughout the 1980s. For example, the overall 1980 Mexican American family poverty rate was 21.4%, compared to 6.3% for Whites. Approximately 10% of the overall Mexican American rate resulted from the inclusion of data on the foreign-born. In 1987, the overall Mexican American family poverty rate was 25.5%, compared to 10.5% for Whites. If data on the foreign-born accounted for a full 30% of the 1987 rate, the native-born Mexican family poverty rate would still be significantly higher than that of Whites.

III. IMMIGRATION AS A CAUSE OF POVERTY

A. Overview

The previous section assessed the impact of immigrant data on the statistical measurement of Hispanic poverty. This section addresses a different question -- the extent to which immigration can be considered a cause of poverty among Hispanics and other disadvantaged Americans. Evidence of this often-alleged causality is examined with regard to:

- Overall labor market impact;
- Impact on Black Americans;
- Impact on U.S.-born Hispanics;
- Economic assimilation.

B. Theoretical Background

Until relatively recently, two schools of thought dominated immigration research. One group of economists advocated what became known as the **displacement thesis**. These economists, including Vernon Briggs and former Secretary of Labor F. Ray Marshall, theorized that immigrants "displace" native workers from jobs both directly and indirectly. They argued that increasing the supply of any commodity -- in this case labor -- cut the price of that commodity (wages). Eventually, wage depression and increasingly poor working conditions "drive out" native workers, resulting in "indirect displacement" of such workers. They further argued that minority and disadvantaged workers are most vulnerable to displacement by immigrants, and that the availability of immigrant labor perpetuates low-wage, low-productivity jobs.

Another set of economists, including Michael Piore and Wayne Cornelius, advocated the **segmentation thesis**. These researchers argued that a dual, "segmented" labor market exists, with rigid tiers of "good" jobs and "bad," primarily menial, low-wage jobs. Because native workers are unlikely to accept these "bad" jobs, Piore and Cornelius argued, immigrants only take the jobs that "Americans don't want," thus filling a labor market void. Proponents of the segmentation thesis were joined by those who added the notion of **complementarity**: these researchers argued that immigrants directly and indirectly increase employment opportunities and income for natives by helping to retain jobs that would otherwise relocate abroad, by increasing productivity, by stimulating demand for goods and services and by starting new businesses.[4]

These two strands of research, regardless of their different perspectives, share two common shortcomings. First, both are almost exclusively theoretical, based on little or no empirical data. Second, both fail to address adequately the two fundamental questions of interest in this paper, i.e., the net, aggregate economic effects of immigrants, and the effects immigration may have on specific groups, including poor Hispanics.

C. Overall Labor Market Impact

In the 1980s, a number of more rigorous empirical studies on this area were carried out. In general, these studies suggest that immigration has, at worst, minor negative and modest positive economic effects in the aggregate.

The empirical data confirm that immigration does lead to some displacement of and wage depression among some groups, although these effects are less severe than commonly believed and appear in many cases to be offset by other factors. For example:

- In 1982, the Los Angeles Times found that of 5,440 jobs "freed" by apprehensions of undocumented workers by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), some 80% were subsequently filled again by unauthorized workers. According to the Times, while many native workers applied for the open positions, very few chose to stay for more than a few days. The Times findings suggested some validity to the segmentation thesis.[5]

- Michael Greenwood's 1983 analysis of time series data from the Social Security Administration attempted to estimate the wage and employment effects of immigration in 11 cities, including Houston, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami. Immigration levels had statistically significant, positive effects on employment in four cities, neutral effects in five cities and no statistically significant effect in two cities. Immigration had statistically significant, positive effects on earnings levels in six cities, negative effects in one city and no effect in two cities.[6]

- A 1984 study by Thomas Muller and Thomas Espenshade, based on Census and CPS data, analyzed the effects of high levels of Mexican immigration to California. The study found no evidence of reduced work opportunities for natives, and despite wage depression in some sectors, wages of all employees -- already above the national average -- rose more rapidly in Los Angeles than in the nation. The study also found that per capita income rose more rapidly in Los Angeles than in the nation as a whole.[7]

- A 1986 study by Kevin McCarthy and R. Burciaga Valdez analyzed immigration to California and found that, in the aggregate, Mexican immigrants did not displace native workers and provided net benefits to the state and regional economies.[8]

- A 1987 study by George Borjas and Marta Tienda found that substitution between immigrant men and native white men is very small; a 10% increase in the supply of male immigrants was estimated to lower the average white male native wage by a maximum of two-tenths of one percent.[9]

These analyses have been complemented by the conclusions of overviews such as Rita Simon's 1985 survey of Nobel Laureates. Simon's survey found virtual unanimity on the question of the effects of immigration -- more than 80% of those surveyed believed that immigration provided net, positive benefits to the receiving country.[10] In 1986, the President's Council of Economic Advisors conducted its own review of immigration studies, finding that the net effect of immigration is to ". . . increase the aggregate income of the native-born population."[11]

In 1989, these and other studies led the Department of Labor to conclude that immigrants cause "only marginal job displacement of domestic workers" and have other, compensating effects:

> First, they increase aggregate demand, thus encouraging investment and fueling an expansion of the market. Second, they keep some U.S. industries competitive by increasing returns to capital. Third,

they increase aggregate employment through rates of self-employment that are substantially higher than those for natives. And fourth, they increase the wages and mobility opportunities for many groups of U.S. workers.[12]

D. Effects on Specific Populations

1. Effects on Black Americans

Although the research discussed above strongly suggests that immigrants have net, aggregate economic effects that are positive, it does not necessarily answer a second question: What is the particular impact of immigration on disadvantaged native groups? Indeed, the best-known displacement thesis maintains that black Americans, who are disproportionately poor, are negatively affected by recent high levels of immigration.

A number of econometric studies have examined the effects of immigration on black employment and wage levels. Based on analyses of the 1970 Census and the 1976 Survey of Income and Education, George Borjas found the entry of Hispanics into local labor markets did not negatively affect blacks; on the contrary, he suggests that Hispanic immigration may have led to small increases in black earnings and employment.[13]

Muller and Espenshade's 1984 analysis of immigration in California came to similar conclusions. They found that between 1970 and 1980 -- a time of high levels of Hispanic immigration to the state -- black labor force participation, employment and wages increased in Los Angeles and California, at rates well above national and state averages.[14]

Muller and Espenshade also examined data from 247 metropolitan areas across the United States, and a subsample of cities in California, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. After controlling for variables known to affect black employment rates, they found no statistically significant relationship between Hispanic immigration and black unemployment; in fact, they concluded that ". . . if anything, black unemployment rates are lowered by a rise in the proportion of Mexican immigrants in a local labor market" (emphasis added).[15] McCarthy and Valdez' analysis confirmed the absence of any discernible negative effect of Hispanic immigration on black employment or earnings in California.[16]

The impact of immigration on disadvantaged workers has also been examined with regard to the "underclass."[17] In a recent article, Robert Reischauer considers evidence that immigration "has contributed to the emergence of the urban underclass." Reischauer concludes that although no final conclusions can be drawn until data from the 1990 census become available, "the existing evidence suggests that immigration has not been a major factor contributing to the emergence of the urban underclass."[18]

Despite the research discussed above, much of what appears in the popular press continues to assume that immigrants adversely affect the employment and wages of blacks.[19] Nonetheless, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that, in the aggregate, Hispanic immigrants serve as a complement to, rather than a substitute for native Black workers.

2. Effects on Hispanic Americans

Hispanic immigration does appear to have some measurable, negative effects on other Hispanics already in the U.S. Such effects are consistent with earlier theoretical and empirical analysis, such as J.B. Grossman's 1982 conclusion that immigrants tend to compete with first and second generation workers of the same ethnicity.[20]

For example, Muller and Espenshade reported that wage growth in immigrant-dominated industries was only about three-fourths of the national average in the 1970s. Overall, they found that Hispanics' wages in California, 25% above the national average in 1970, were at parity with the national average by 1980.[21] McCarthy and Valdez reported essentially similar findings. Many industry-specific analyses also report wage depression and erosion of working conditions coincident with increasing proportions of immigrant workers.[22]

These findings may be less straightforward than they appear. First, it is not clear whether immigrant-related wage depression occurs primarily among native-born workers, or among the immigrant Hispanics themselves. For example, Muller and Espenshade argue that immigrants themselves may absorb the bulk of apparent earnings losses.[23] While the presence of immigrants in a specific industry may result in lower average Hispanic wages, this lower average wage may reflect a higher proportion of low-wage earning immigrants in the industry, rather than a decrease in the wages of the native-born Hispanics. In other words, it may be the <u>workforce composition</u> that changes, not the <u>economic status of the already employed workers</u>.

Second, it is not clear whether immigrant-related changes in the workforce composition are in fact caused by immigration. For example, the Department of Labor's 1989 report notes that immigrants may suffer from "guilt by association," since the jobs they accept are located predominantly in firms and industries already undergoing restructuring. Wage depression may therefore precede, not follow, the entrance of immigrants into that labor market.[24] The complexity of the relationship between immigration and subsequent changes in wages and workforce composition has been demonstrated in Cornelius' recent and extensive case studies of immigrant-dominated firms in California; Cornelius' findings underscore the absence of unequivocal cause-effect explanations.[25]

3. Immigration Status, Human Capital, and Economic Assimilation

Two observations may be made with regard to the characteristics and internal dynamics of the immigrant population. First, most immigrants -- both legal and undocumented -- appear to have demographic and human capital characteristics similar to those of the native population. Moreover, the literature suggests that human capital characteristics are more important determinants of income and earnings than immigration status. A series of studies confirm that factors such as education, experience, age, and English proficiency are positively associated with immigrants' earnings,[26] although these characteristics may yield different results in different markets. Related studies also confirm that when these factors are held constant, immigration status is not a primary determinant of wages.[27]

Second, research also indicates that the earnings of immigrants (Hispanics and others) increase considerably over time. In one earnings study, Barry Chiswick analyzed 1970 Census data on the earnings of U.S.-born Americans, immigrants who had been in the U.S. for ten years, and immigrants who had been in the U.S. for twenty years. Chiswick found that the earnings of the twenty-year immigrants were greater than the earnings of both the more recent immigrants and the native-born. Chiswick concluded that immigrants' earnings increase with time, and eventually surpass those of the native-born.[28]

George Borjas, however, has argued persuasively that Chiswick's conclusions are not supported by Chiswick's findings. As Borjas demonstrates, Chiswick's study is essentially a "snapshot" of the economic status of a particular group of people in 1970. Borjas subsequently has developed his own analysis in which he identified cohorts of immigrants by their date-of-entry, comparing the earnings of each cohort at two different points in time (1970 and 1980), as well as comparing the change in one cohort's earnings with the change in earnings of an earlier cohort. The first comparison revealed findings similar to those of Chiswick, specifically, that each immigrant cohort's earnings were higher in 1980 than in 1970. However, the second, more sophisticated comparison examined the rate at which a cohort's earnings grew, rather than the difference between earnings at two points in time. Borjas found that the more recent the immigrant cohort, the slower the rate at which their earnings had increased. Borjas also found slightly slower earnings growth for all groups of immigrants compared to the native-born.[29] Borjas attributed this slower earnings growth to different characteristics of more recent immigrants, including fewer skills or lower motivation levels. Others have argued that this slower growth may reflect changes in the labor market, rather than changes in the characteristics of immigrants themselves.

In sum, both Borjas and Chiswick have found some evidence that the earnings of immigrants increase over time, relative to those of natives, and that the experience of Hispanic immigrants generally follows this trend.[30] Questions still remain, however, as to the conclusions which may be drawn from this evidence.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. Research Conclusions

This synthesis of immigration research suggests three conclusions:

- **The presence of immigrants does not seriously distort aggregate Hispanic poverty statistics.** As noted in section II, removing immigrants from aggregate Hispanic data does not significantly reduce or affect underlying Hispanic poverty trends.

- **Immigration does not appear to be a primary cause of persistent poverty among Hispanics or other disadvantaged Americans.** As noted in Section III, immigration does appear to contribute to some depression

of wages earned by some native Hispanics. However, there does not appear to be evidence of significant unemployment or earnings losses among disadvantaged native-born Americans -- Hispanics or non-Hispanic -- attributable to immigration.

- **Better data collection and more research are needed to more precisely assess and quantify the effects of immigration on Hispanic poverty.** The absence of longitudinal data bases with both indicators of poverty status and acceptably large subsamples of immigrants seriously undermines both the types and quality of research on this issue. In addition, the limitations of current research make it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the effect of the U.S. economy's internationalization and restructuring from the independent effects of immigration on the economic status of Hispanics.[31]

B. The Policy Context

The relationship between immigration and poverty has both immediate immigration policy implications and potential poverty policy manifestations.

1. Immigration Policy

The passage and implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) has and will continue to dominate immigration policy debate for several years to come. It is significant, therefore, that the debate surrounding IRCA rested primarily on the assumption that undocumented workers "steal" jobs from U.S.-born Americans.

At present, this and related assumptions remain catalysts behind a number of current proposals, including:

- New restrictions on the number of legal immigrants allowed to enter the U.S.;
- Greater linkage between labor market needs and the immigrant selection process, combined with tighter restrictions on family-based immigration;
- Establishment of domestic employment and training program stipulations related to immigrants and/or levels of immigration;
- Expansion in temporary worker programs as an alternative to and/or supplement for increased legal immigration.

2. Poverty Policy

The immigration issue has not yet had a significant discernible impact on poverty policy. However, several emerging arguments could have a dramatic impact on perceptions of Hispanic poverty policy needs. For example:

- Linda Chavez argues that Hispanic poverty is attributable primarily to the presence of immigrants and that public policy responses to address growing Hispanic poverty are thus unnecessary.[32]

- Anti-immigrant organizations such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) argue that increased immigration is a major cause of poverty among native-born Americans; restrictive immigration is an important anti-poverty strategy.[33]

- Recent debate over proposed legal immigration legislation included concern that although immigrants may not cause poverty, their presence and identification among the poor reduces the political will necessary to expand programs to improve the education and employability of native-born disadvantaged groups.[34]

- Despite the General Accounting Office's documentation of a "widespread pattern of [employment] discrimination" caused by legislation aimed at stemming illegal immigration, recent editorials by the Washington Post (4/1/90), the Los Angeles Times (4/1/90), and the New York Times (4/2/90) have argued that that law should not be altered.[35]

Although each of these arguments commands some degree of public support, each has received significant criticism. For example, Chavez' claims have been challenged by a range of scholars and advocates who point to flaws in her methodology and logic.[36] Similarly, FAIR has come under serious attack for its claims and for basing them on methodologically unsound studies, such as a widely disregarded recent poll by the American Immigration Control Foundation.[37] As far as political issues, many observers believe that the political implications of high immigration remain speculative, with a range of possible and probable interpretations.[38] Finally, those in favor of repealing IRCA's employer sanctions provisions argue that no public policy objective justifies legislation which creates discrimination, particularly discrimination among those not intended to be affected by the law, such as U.S.-born Hispanics and Asians.[39]

B. Public Policy Observations

Based on these conclusions, the following public policy observations can be made:

- Hispanic poverty is primarily a reflection of the situation faced by U.S.-born Hispanics. Overemphasis of Hispanic immigration may divert attention from essential policy responses to Hispanic poverty;

- U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics share similar human capital characteristics and could benefit equally from human capital development;

- Rhetoric which has the effect of "scapegoating" immigrants may be a political barrier to anti-poverty strategies and contributes to broad anti-Hispanic sentiment;

- Since problems such as discrimination occur among both U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics, and since a large proportion of foreign-born Hispanic households also include U.S. citizens,[40] policies that negatively affect immigrants can also have adverse effects on U.S.-born Hispanics.

C. The Future

As this paper demonstrates, the research and public policy questions surrounding Hispanic immigration and poverty are as complex as they are important. As the coming decade unfolds, one challenge will be to recognize these questions and translate them into better opportunities for all Hispanics.

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William P. O'Hare, Assimilation and Socioeconomic Advancement of Hispanics In The U.S., (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau), April 1989.

Endnotes

1. There are, of course, some notable exceptions, including Lief Jensen's "Poverty and Immigration in the U.S.: 1960-1980" in Divided Opportunities: Minority Poverty and Social Policy, ed., Marta Tienda and Gary Sandefur, (New York: Plenum Press), 1988; and Roger Waldinger's "Immigration and Urban Change," a paper prepared for the Annual Review of Sociology, September, 1988.

2. Although this paper does not review literature from other disciplines -- such as education and sociology -- we hope this discussion will complement and stimulate work in areas we have not addressed.

3. All Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens; 51% of Puerto Ricans living in the continental U.S. were born outside the continental U.S. According to 1980 Census Bureau data, Puerto Ricans born in the continental U.S. had a median family income 6% higher than those born on the island of Puerto Rico. The median family income of Puerto Ricans born on the island equaled 94% of those born on the mainland.

4. For an extensive review of the literature, see: U.S. Department of Labor, The Effects of Immigration on the U.S. Economy and Labor Market, Immigration and Policy Research Report 1, 1989; for a brief review of pre-1985 research, see: National Council of La Raza, "Undocumented Workers in the Labor Market: Recent Research Findings," Issue Brief, February 1985.

5. "Most Aliens Regain Jobs After Raids; Survey Contradicts INS Findings That Sweeps Succeeded," Los Angeles Times, August 1, 1982.

6. Michael J. Greenwood, "Regional Aspects of Immigrant Location Patterns in the United States," U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy, Mary M. Kritz, ed., (Lexington, MA: D.C. Health and Co.), 1983.

7. Thomas Muller and Thomas Espenshade, The Fourth Wave, California's Newest Immigrants, (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press), 1985.

8. Kevin F. McCarthy and R. Burciaga Valdez, Current and Future Effects of Mexican Immigration to California, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation), 1986.

9. George J. Borjas and Marta Tienda, "The Economic Consequences of Immigration," Science, February 1987.

10. Stephen Moore, "Social Scientists' Views on Immigrants and U.S. Immigration Policy: A Postscript," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, September 1986.

11. Council of Economic Advisors, "The Economic Effects of Immigration," The Economic Report of the President, 1986.

12. U.S. Department of Labor, op.cit.

13. George J. Borjas, "Assimilation, Changes in Cohort Quality, and the Earnings of Immigrants," Journal of Labor Economics, October, 1985.

14. Muller and Espenshade, op.cit.

15. Muller and Espenshade, op.cit.

16. McCarthy and Valdez, op.cit.

17. Erol R. Ricketts and Isabel V. Sawhill, "Defining and Measuring the Underclass," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Vol. 7, No. 2, 316-325 (1988).

18. Robert Reischauer, "Immigration and the Underclass," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No. 501, January 1989.

19. See, for example, "Miami Girds for Police Officer's Trial in Shooting," Washington Post, November 13, 1989. The article states, in pertinent part:

> As Hispanics flowed into the city [Miami] over the last quarter-century, they took entry level jobs that otherwise might have gone to blacks. When the new immigrants began to establish businesses, they hired other Hispanics...

No research or researcher is cited to substantiate this assertion. Moreover, the article later notes that one of the initial advocates of this thesis:

> ...has revised his thinking and now believes that Hispanics expanded the economy, creating their own jobs and taking none away from blacks.

20. J.B. Grossman, "The Substitutability of Natives and Immigrants in Production," Review of Economics and Statistics, November, 1982.

21. Muller and Espenshade, op.cit.

22. For an exhaustive review of these studies, see: U.S. Department, op.cit. See also: Wayne A. Cornelius, "The Role of Mexican Labor in the U.S. Economy: Two Generation of Research," mimeograph, University of California at San Diego, July 1984.

23. Muller and Espenshade, op.cit.

24. U.S. Department of Labor, op.cit.

25. Cornelius, op.cit.

26. See: Demetrious G. Papademetriou and Thomas Muller, "Recent Immigration to New York: Labor Market and Social Policy Issues," National Commission for Employment Policy, 1987; Barry R. Chiswick, Illegal Aliens: Their Employment and Employers, (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute), 1988; Frank Bean, et. al., "Undocumented Migration to the United States: Perceptions and Evidence," Demography, February 1988; Frank Bean, et.al. "What the 1980 Census Tells Us About the Characteristics of Illegal and Legal Mexican Immigrants," University of Texas at Austin, 1984.

27. Chiswick, op.cit.

28. Barry Chiswick, An Analysis of the Economic Progress and Impact of Immigrants, U.S. Department of Labor, 1980; see also: Chiswick, "The Economic Progress of Immigrants: Some Apparently Universal Patterns," Contemporary Economic Problems, W. Fellner, ed., (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute), 1979; Borjas, "The Earnings of Male Hispanic Immigrants to the United States," Industrial and Labor Relations Review, April, 1982; G. DeFreitas, "Occupational Mobility Among Recent Black Immigrants," Proceedings of the 33rd Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association, 1981.

29. George Borjas, "Self-Selection and the Earnings of Immigrants," American Economic Review, 1987; Borjas, "Immigration, Minorities, and Labor Market Competition," Industrial Labor Relations Review, 1987.

30. U.S. Department of Labor, op.cit.

31. Other issues to be explored include: the social and economic interaction between U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics; parallels between immigration processes and Puerto Rican patterns of migration; the social and economic characteristics of first and second generation Hispanics.

32. See, for example, Linda Chavez' article "Tequila Sunrise: The Slow But Steady Progress of Hispanic Immigrants," in the Heritage Foundation publication Policy Review, Spring, 1989.

33. See, for example, issues of the Federation for American Immigration Reform newsletter, Immigration Report.

34. See U.S. House of Representatives hearings regarding legal immigration, Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugee, and International Law, February 21, March 1, and March 3, 1990.

35. Immigration Reform: Employer Sanctions and the Question of Discrimination, General Accounting Office, March 1990.

36. See, for example, Letters to the Editor in Policy Review, Fall, 1990; "The Myth of Hispanic Progress: Trends in the Educational and Economic Attainment of Mexican Americans," Jorge Chapa, Assistant Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin, publication forthcoming; etc.

37. See "Immigration Group's 'Poll' Provokes Furor," Hispanic Link Weekly Report, February 19, 1990.

38. See, for example, the roundtable summary in Appendix A of this report.

39. See, for example, Raul Yzaguirre's editorial "Employer Sanctions Don't Work," The Washington Post, April 3, 1990.

40. See for example, "Highlights: A Survey of Newly-Legalized Persons in California," California Health and Welfare Agency, August, 1989. In data collected from 5,091 interviews, 60% of newly-legalized immigrants had U.S. citizen family members.

Appendix A

Hispanic Poverty: How Much Does Immigration Explain?
A Discussion Summary

On November 27, 1989, The National Council of La Raza's Poverty Project sponsored a one-day roundtable entitled "Hispanic Immigration and Poverty: Research and Policy Issues for the Next Decade." At this roundtable, public policy analysts, advocates, and researchers discussed the economic relationship between Hispanic immigration and the persistence of poverty among Hispanics in the U.S. The discussion focused on three questions raised in Julie Quiroz' paper prepared for the roundtable:

- *Do data on Hispanic immigrants distort statistical measures of Hispanics' overall economic status?*
- *Does immigration cause poverty among U.S.-born Hispanics?*
- *What current and potential public policy significance do answers to these questions hold?*

The following is a brief description of each roundtable presentation and highlights of the day's discussion.

Hispanic Immigration and the Measurement of Hispanic Poverty
Frank D. Bean
Co-Director, Program for Research on Immigration Policy; Director, Population Studies Center; Urban Institute

> *Immigration is having an impact on the measurement of Hispanic poverty, but not a large enough impact to obscure a fundamental point: Hispanics' economic status is significantly lower than that of Whites.*
>
> -- Frank Bean

In his presentation, Bean outlined six immigration-related factors which should be taken into account in the measurement of Hispanic poverty. Bean argued that four of the factors -- Hispanic subgroup distinctions, documented versus undocumented Hispanic immigrant differences, native versus foreign-born household composition variations, and undercount of Hispanics in the Census --are important issues to be addressed in future research. Bean felt that two other factors -- native versus foreign-born Hispanic differences, and changing human capital characteristics of different Hispanic immigrant waves -- are significant, but perhaps exaggerated in popular thinking.

Bean's presentation included the following conclusions:

- Immigration was unrelated to the drop in Mexican American poverty between 1970 and 1980. From 1970 to 1980, the foreign-born proportion of the Mexican American population grew from 18% to 26% while the poverty rate declined by 5 percentage points. If there had been no change in the proportion of the Mexican American population that was foreign-born, the decline in the Mexican American poverty rate would have been only four-tenths of a percentage point less.

- The difference between Hispanic and White poverty rates in the 1980s does not appear to be attributable to immigration. For example, Bean addressed the following question: if all of the differential between the 1987 Mexican American and White poverty rates was attributable to immigration, what would the foreign-born Mexican American poverty rate have to have been? Assuming that 30% of the Mexican American population was foreign-born, the foreign-born poverty rate would have to have been a highly implausible 60% in order to result in the overall 1987 Mexican American poverty rate.

- The gap between recent immigrants' educational attainment levels and those of native Whites has grown because immigrants' educational attainment levels have not kept pace with those of native Whites. In absolute terms, immigrants' educational attainment levels have improved, but not at the rate of native Whites.

- Very little research has examined differences in the economic status and mobility of legal versus undocumented immigrants. Such research would be revealing, particularly in light of studies demonstrating that the proportion of legal and undocumented immigrants varies among different waves of immigrants.

Immigration and Poverty Dynamics
Demetrious Papademetriou
Director, Division of Immigration Policy and Research
U.S. Department of Labor

In the 1990s, all of our fates will rely increasingly on immigration policy. There are many "wildcards," such as the European situation, which may mean we need

a much smaller military and support infrastructure, and that we can re-channel and re-focus resources into the civil economy.

-- Demetrious Papademetriou

Papademetriou addressed the relationship between immigration and persistent economic disadvantage among Hispanics by summarizing some of the primary findings of the Department of Labor's comprehensive report The Effects of Immigration on the U.S. Economy and Labor Market (June, 1989). Papemetriou emphasized the different types of findings which different types of analyses reveal. He also pointed out the limitations of both aggregate and industry-specific studies: in aggregate studies, significant variations can be masked over; in industry-specific studies, variations in research hypotheses and methodologies make general public policy conclusions virtually impossible. As an alternative, Papademetriou encouraged studies of local labor markets, arguing that these studies employ "the most appropriate unit of analysis" and could be extremely useful in the public policy arena.

Papademetriou also advanced two broad conclusions:

- Aggregate studies find that immigration produces a small positive impact on labor markets overall, as well as a small positive impact on the labor market status of Blacks. These studies also find that where negative impacts have been documented, they have been among native-born of the same ethnicity as the immigrants.

- In "micro" studies of specific industries, Papademetriou argued, "the picture changes a bit, but the findings remain mixed." Ultimately, these studies show that the immigrant/native-born relationship is harmonious, with immigrants establishing particular economic niches, contributing to the overall dynamism of the economy, and causing little displacement. "Some anomalies" exist, however, such as a well-known California study which found a complete transformation of the janitor industry from one of primarily unionized Black workers to one of primarily non-unionized recent immigrants. Papademetriou cautioned that the study's implications remain unclear because the Black workers who left the industry were not studied to determine whether their economic situation was enhanced or diminished by the industry transformation.

Discussion

Discussion of these presentations focused primarily on two issues:

- **Definitions of poverty.** Some roundtable participants were concerned with the definition of poverty itself. For example, the government's official income-based poverty definition identifies people below a certain income level, but does not indicate a person's past or potential mobility. At least in part because of limitations such as this, the popularity of alternative definitions has grown in recent years; for example, "underclass" scholars such as Martha Van Haitsma have attempted to clarify the limits of income-based definitions and to develop contextual definitions of disadvantage. During the roundtable discussion, the contextual definition issue also arose.

  Some roundtable discussants expressed frustration with a definition of poverty which does not distinguish the immigrant Hispanic experience from that of the native-born Hispanic. Skerry pointed to evidence that immigrants are relatively satisfied with their economic status and hold fairly optimistic views of their potential mobility. Other discussants emphasized the significance of these distinctions in terms of politics, labor market dynamics, and social programs. For example, the political demands of Hispanic immigrants who are satisfied with their economic status and potential mobility may be quite different from those of native-born Hispanics who are unsatisfied with their economic status and potential mobility (Skerry). Or, in terms of employment and wages, an immigrant Hispanic may be more likely to accept a low-pay job than his/her native-born counterpart (Ricketts). With respect to social programs, native- and foreign-born Hispanics may have different priorities, preferences, and needs with regard to the types of assistance or training they will seek or accept (Glasgow, Romero).

  Ricketts also argued that although income-defined poverty does not guarantee that an individual will be overwhelmed by his/her situation and therefore unable to change it, low income certainly increases the likelihood of this impact, and is therefore a meaningful barometer of disadvantage.

- **Generational differences.** The discussion of immigrants' perceptions of their economic status and mobility prompted discussion of cross-generational research. Chapa, Bean, and Ricketts pointed to research showing that the extent to which the first generation does not establish itself contributes to

the social and economic problems of the second generation. Because a high proportion of Hispanics are first generation Americans, their present experiences may shape the experiences and issues of future generations.

Respondents

Linda Chavez, Policy Fellow, The Manhattan Institute

Chavez began with the premise that poverty cannot be eliminated, and cited as evidence the continuation of poverty since the War On Poverty. The question, she asserted, is "Are Hispanics doing worse and, if so, why?" Chavez did not seek to answer that question, but focused primarily on the ways in which poverty among Mexican Americans is unique, particularly their high levels of labor force participation. Chavez saw this high labor force participation as a "tremendous reason for optimism," with positive manifestations such as working role models. Chavez also pointed to research which finds that if Mexican Americans possessed the same levels of human capital (e.g., education, English proficiency, job training, etc.) as Whites, the difference in their poverty rates would be only 2%. Applying the same analysis to a Black/White comparison, the difference in poverty rates remains a relatively high 7%. Chavez concluded that this study shows that Hispanics have a large degree of "control over factors contributing to poverty."

Jorge Chapa, Assistant Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin

Chapa discussed his research in which he compares the social and economic status of third generation Mexican Americans and third generation Anglos. His impetus for this research, he stated, was that public attention on immigration has clouded the problems faced by native-born Mexican Americans. Chapa also pointed out that, unlike other groups, third generation Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks do not have economic parity with Anglos. Chapa also challenged Chavez's conclusions regarding the "controlability" of Mexican American human capital improvements, claiming that Chavez ignores the fact that Mexican Americans' levels of human capital have not improved relative to Anglos, and that this lack of improvement reflects public policies that have not increased Mexican Americans' opportunities to enhance their human capital.

From his research, Chapa concludes that both a Mexican American middle class and lower class exist. However, because of the lower class' strong labor force attachment, he does not believe it constitutes a Hispanic "underclass." His greatest concern however, is the extent to which the Mexican American middle class

can sustain itself, and the degree to which the lower class will sustain its high levels of labor force participation.

Doris Meissner, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Meissner focused on three points:

- The need for economic historical research on the experience of Hispanic immigrants, particularly research focused on the role played by institutions such as schools in the Hispanic immigrant establishment process. Meissner speculated that schools may not be serving the "assimilation" function they served at earlier points in history;

- The increasing role of racial discrimination in the experience of immigrants. Meissner pointed out that a higher proportion of present-day immigrants come from places with predominantly non-White populations (e.g., Mexico, Africa, etc.), whereas earlier waves of immigrants come from places with predominantly White populations (Ireland, Germany, Italy). Immigration is therefore tied more closely to race or skin-color, and the potential for discrimination based on race or skin-color may be higher;

- The degree to which the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) may alter Hispanic immigrant population composition and dynamics. For example, Meissner predicted a higher proportion of documented versus undocumented immigrants, and an increased significance of documentation as a determinant of economic mobility.

<u>Discussion</u>

- **Changing Economy** Chapa focused on Meissner's question about the role of schools in the immigrant "assimilation" process; Chapa felt that changes in the immigrant assimilation process were not related to institutions such as schools, but to changes in the wage structure of the U.S. economy and employer demands for increasingly higher educational credentials. This assertion was echoed by Aida Rodriguez who pointed to research which suggests that the proportion of low-wage jobs has remained significant, but that their attainment requires increasingly higher levels of education and other acquired skills. Papademetriou agreed with this "rising credentialism," and felt that changes in the U.S. economy have been somewhat exaggerated, pointing

to the economy's relatively high level of diversity and the slowed pace of the manufacturing sector decline.

- **Discrimination.** Skerry argued that Hispanics do not constitute a race and pointed to Hispanics' overwhelming self-identification as White in Census Bureau surveys. Because Hispanics are not a race, he continued, they cannot be considered victims of racial discrimination. He also argued that discrimination against Hispanics stems from characteristics over which they have control, such as an "accent." A number of other discussants voiced strong disagreement with his assertions, arguing that:

  - There is substantial empirical and anecdotal evidence that Hispanics have been the victims of employment discrimination, housing discrimination, educational discrimination, and other forms of discrimination. (Munoz. et. al.)

  - The core of the discrimination issue is selective denial of opportunity or privilege based on bias, not the individual's self-perception or a judgement as to the immutability of his or her personal characteristics. (Kohn, Duany, et. al.)

  - Hispanics' self-identification as White reflects the survey questionnaire's constraints as well as an historical black/white social dichotomy. (Quiroz, et. al.)

Immigration Policy: Facts, Politics, and Emotion

Rick Swartz, Past President
National Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Forum

Slogans, headlines, and advocacy are going to have a greater impact on policy than research, unless we become more deliberate, systematic, and perhaps strategic on how we meld the research and knowledge industry with the policymaking process.

-- Rick Swartz

Swartz began his presentation with a historical overview of immigration policy, including the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s, the national origins quotas of the early 1900s, the McCarren-Walters Act of the 1950s, the 1965 elimination of national origin quotas, and the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act (IRCA). Swartz argued that most of these policies were driven by myth, rather than fact. The job of the researcher, he argued, is not just to "do good research that is policy relevant, but to be part of the process of achieving consensus on the facts ... to isolate studies that are not methodologically sound." Swartz pointed to studies such as Huddle's 1982 depiction of displacement in the Houston construction industry, which was able to catch wide media attention despite its serious methodological flaws. Swartz also argued that restrictionist organizations have used political pressure to influence research funding.

In the arena of poverty policy, Swartz saw the use of immigration misconceptions as a "divide and conquer strategy," pitting different disenfranchised groups against each other. As an example, Swartz pointed to anti-immigrant radio advertisements which have been targeted specifically to Black audiences. Swartz also cited Peter Skerry's argument that affirmative action does not apply to immigrants as an attempt to confuse and disempower broad-based civil rights efforts.

Immigration: A Mild Card for Poverty Policy?
Cushing Dolbeare, Chair, National Low Income Housing Coalition; Chair, Coalition On Human Needs

> *Political and social perceptions about minorities and poor people are something that goes way beyond immigration.*
>
> -- Cushing Dolbeare

Dolbeare focused initially on recent aggregate trends that have characterized the Hispanic population, then on ways in which public policies may or should be affected by current and future immigration trends. In terms of aggregate statistics, Dolbeare concluded along with other participants that "if immigration were having a significant impact, we'd see it" in the data. In a brief review of the data, she failed to find any statistical indications of this impact.

Dolbeare argued that the primary barrier against effective federal policies for poor Hispanics is lack of committed resources. She saw little likelihood for improvement in the face of Gramm-Rudman legislation and the federal budget deficit.

Dolbeare emphasized that demographic changes in the U.S. population, such as a changing age structure and relatively low birth rate, will make the U.S. economy increasingly reliant on immigration. On these grounds, Dolbeare believes that advocates

have a "compelling case for making programs we provide for improving education or job training available to immigrants as a matter of policy which will benefit all of us."

Respondents:

Isabel V. Sawhill, Senior Fellow, The Urban Institute

Sawhill's discussion focused on the present context of poverty policy development. Sawhill argued that some general explanations of poverty in the 1980s apply to many groups. These explanations include the proportion of single parent families, the very high unemployment of the early 1980s, the weakened social safety net, and others. A mandate has formed, she believes, on the need to invest in children, including pre-natal care and developmental day care programs. Sawhill also sees consensus forming around the need to help the working poor and believes this consensus can ultimately benefit Hispanics, who are becoming recognized as a working poor population. Sawhill expressed concern with current discussions of labor shortages in which immigration may be seen "as a device for meeting services without investing in native-born disadvantaged workers."

Michael Myers, Counsel, Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs

Myers discussed the impact of labor market issues on recent legislation and the role which research can play in influencing public policy. First, Myers argued that in current immigration policy debate there is a "growing desire to be responsive to the labor market. We have been trying to respond affirmatively to labor market shortages, not responding to charges that immigration has a negative impact." He agreed with Dolbeare that the U.S. economy's need for immigrants is a fact which need to be more effectively communicated. He also pointed out that while "the facts" are important, they "don't have a life of their own, they fit in with a whole host of factors. We can't expect that they are going to override values people hold." Research which communicates facts is therefore less useful than research which uses facts to come up with recommendations. Myers also emphasized the public policy need for research which distinguishes documented from undocumented immigrants. Overall, Myers believes the issue of poverty is not currently having a significant impact on immigration policy.

Discussion

- **Public Interest Strategies.** Skerry responded to Swartz by arguing that Black and Hispanic organizations exacerbate and perpetuate their communities' difficulties by focusing on the problems of each population, and that it is in the self-

interest of these organizations to do so. Skerry was challenged by a number of participants, including Munoz, who argued that representatives of disadvantaged communities have a responsibility to address problems, and that it is illogical to blame these organizations for the perpetuation of such problems.

Labor Shortages. In reaction to Sawhill's concern with regard to labor shortages, Kamasaki argued that restrictionism is not a means for improving opportunities for the native-born. "Restrictionism doesn't translate into programs for native-born Hispanics, it hurts both ... It's a small step from an 'either/or' conception to an 'immigrants are the problem' conception." Sawhill agreed with Kamasaki's concern, pointing to the debate regarding the black "underclass:"

> Immigration has been part of the discussion of the growth of the 'underclass', namely, that the underclass is growing because of competition from women and immigrants, an alternative supply of labor. Undereducated natives -- particularly Blacks, are believed to be the ones left out. This thesis doesn't hold water -- as people like Reischauer have shown. But, two years ago, I couldn't get an answer to that question. Ten years ago, the consensus was just the opposite.

The roundtable concluded with Sawhill's assessment of the degree to which poverty analysts need educating on the issue of immigration.